

## **Serving With The Servant's Strength**

### **Selected Scriptures**

Bryn MacPhail / April 5, 2012

*Maundy Thursday service at Trinity Methodist Church*

I think that the average Christian understands the importance of *servicing*.

Passages like John 13 remind us of this as we witness Jesus, the Son of God, washing His disciples' feet.

Making sure the lesson is not lost on them, Jesus says to His disciples, **"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you"** (Jn. 13:15).

Most Christians that I have met appreciate their obligation to serve and are even willing to get their hands dirty in the process.

But I also have some concerns as I watch my fellow Christians render their well-meaning service.

Maybe you have seen this too—maybe you have seen as I have, Christians who wear themselves out because of their commitment to serve.

This evening I want to talk to you about the potential of misplaced service, and I want to encourage you to engage in service in a manner that maximizes Christ's glory and doesn't burn you out.

If you've ever been worn out because of your eagerness to engage in Christian service, I pray this message tonight will be liberating for you.

Here's the first principle I want to set out before you:

*Stop serving Jesus...Stop serving Jesus as if He needed you.*

Where do we see this principle?

Let's begin with Mark 10, verse 45, where Jesus says to His followers, "**For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.**"

The equation that I think many live by is we understand our need to be served by Christ in order to be redeemed by Christ—but after that, we think it is our responsibility to serve Christ.

I just don't think that is what the New Testament teaches.

As I survey the New Testament, I see *a need for the Christian to be continually served by Christ.*

Jesus says, "**the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve**" and I don't think we should put an expiry date on that statement.

Accordingly, I think there is a wrong way to serve.

The apostle Paul suggests the same when he says to the people of Athens in Acts 17:25, "**(God) is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things.**"

In other words, God does not want to be served in a way that implies we are supplying Him with something that He does not already own.

*Stop serving Jesus...as if He needed you.*

I also note that this particular point sets Christianity apart from virtually every other world religion.

In virtually every world religion, salvation is gained when a person offers appropriate service to the deity, or when a person successfully adheres to a set of universal principles.

Christianity, however, is the one religion where poor performance does not keep a person from gaining salvation.

Christianity is unique in its assertion that the Creator must serve the created being in order for the created being to gain salvation.

This notion, of the Deity serving the created being, is scandalous to the natural mind. It was scandalous to Peter who said to Jesus, "**You shall never wash my feet**"(Jn.13:8).

But what does Jesus say to Peter in reply? "**If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me**"(Jn.13:8).

Many of us who were raised in Christian homes were taught at a very young age about the importance of serving Jesus.

But I wonder how many of us were taught about *the necessity of Jesus serving us?*

Our first principle was framed in the negative: *Stop serving Jesus as if He needed you.*

I want to frame the 2<sup>nd</sup> principle in the positive. You've heard me suggest that there is a wrong way to serve, but *what is the right way to serve?*

The apostle Peter answers in 1Peter 4:11: "**Whoever serves let him do so with the strength which God supplies**".

God does not expect us to serve by our own strength.

*God wants us to serve one another with the strength He supplies.*

It's possible that you are wondering, 'What is God's purpose here? Why does Christ want to do all the serving?'

This too, is answered in 1Peter 4:11, "**whoever serves let him do so with the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.**"

When Jesus serves us, God gets the glory.

This is the standard we see throughout Scripture: *the giver gets the glory.*

We see this is Psalm 50, verse 15, "**Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I shall rescue you, and you will honour Me.**"

We ask for help. God provides, and God gets the honour.

If God needed our help, if He needed us to serve Him, then we would get the glory.

But this is not the case--God does not need us, He "**is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything.**"

The first reason we should serve with the strength God supplies is because *God is glorified when we depend upon His strength.*

The second reason why we should serve with the strength God supplies is because *the enduring fruitfulness of our labour depends upon God's serving us.*

Jesus explains this principle in John 15, where He says, "**I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing**"(Jn.15:5).

The word "**nothing**" is quite definitive, don't you think? Jesus could have said:

'Apart from Me, success will be more difficult.'

'Apart from Me, your accomplishments will be limited.'

'Apart from Me, you can only do so much.'

But Jesus does not say any of these things. Jesus says, "**If I do not (serve) you, you have no part with Me**"(Jn.13:8).

He says, "**apart from Me you can do nothing**"(Jn.15:5).

Has this been your experience? It certainly has been mine.

I have had days where the simplest set of tasks has totally worn me out because I did not rely on the strength of Christ.

Conversely, I have also had days where I did far beyond what I thought was possible because I relied on the strength of Another.

I remember back to my childhood and one of my favourite parts of the church service was when the collection plate was passed.

I was eager to put some money in the plate and pass it along.

The problem was that, as a young child, I did not have any money of my own.

So what I would do is I would ask my mother for some money.

My mother could have put all the money in the plate herself.

But instead, she would give me money to put in the plate.

This is a little bit like how we are to function in our relationship with Christ.



Jesus could look after everything on His own. He doesn't need our contributions.

But what He has chosen to do is to provide us with the resources to make on contribution on His behalf.

His governing principle remains: "**the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve**"(Mk.10:45).

As you think about the different ways you are currently serving Christ, or could in the future serve Christ, I implore you--do not rely upon your own strength.

Do not trust in your intellect, your experience, or your natural abilities.

If our labour is to glorify God, and if the fruits of our labour are to endure, we must learn to serve with the strength God supplies.

Nearly 2000 years ago, the Son of God stooped to wash the feet of His followers.

Friends, I want you to know that Jesus continues to stoop before His followers.

Jesus came to serve...and He continues to serve.

As you seek to serve one another, be sure to let the Great Servant serve you. Amen.